

UC president: UC Merced medical school to proceed 'as quickly as reasonable'

By Danielle Gaines

[Merced Sun-Star](#): University of California President Mark Yudof said planning for a medical school at UC Merced will continue “as quickly as reasonable” both academically and fiscally.

Yudof made the statement at this morning’s University of California Board of Regents meeting.

He cited a report from the Washington Advisory Group, a consulting firm hired to guide the next steps in planning for a medical school at UC Merced.

In the report, the Washington Advisory Group suggests an extended timeline – beyond the originally planned 2013 opening date – for the medical school. Yudof said he and UC Merced Chancellor Steve Kang agreed with the suggestions.

Yudof then authorized Jack Stobo, UC senior vice president for health sciences and services, and the UC Merced staff to begin implementing the first step of a phased approach to founding the medical school by creating an undergraduate-level medical education program.

Phase two is to begin planning for medical school in conjunction with another school in the system.

Chancellor Kang issued a statement shortly after the announcement: “While the timetable for a fully accredited, completely independent medical school is difficult to predict at this time due to the State of California’s dire financial situation, the UC Merced School of Medicine will come to fruition,” it said in part.

Kang went on to say that “the opening of the medical school would be linked to the availability of

resources, the further development of core academic programs and the enhancement of health services research and education on campus.”

This is not the first time plans for the medical school have been in the news recently.

A fast track medical school plan was presented by Lt. Gov. John Garamendi last month. Without a lower-cost alternative, Garamendi said it was likely the Merced medical school would be delayed and perhaps never opened at all as the state's budget crisis mounts. Garamendi is also an ex-officio member of the Board of Regents; his son, John Garamendi Jr., works as the vice chancellor for University Relations at UC Merced.

Lt. Gov. Garamendi said in a phone interview after the announcement that he is pleased with the Washington Advisory Group's suggestion.

“I am very pleased,” Garamendi said. “Clearly (President Yudof) has authorized his office and UC Merced staff to plan for an undergraduate medical education program.”

Garamendi added that the WAG suggestions were “completely in line with my suggestion” for a stripped-down version of the initial medical school that will be built up in the future.

“Over time, there will be a full-blown medical school at UC Merced similar to what the other UC schools have,” Garamendi said.

It is widely believed by university and community leaders that a medical school at UC Merced will provide more doctors that are sorely needed in this area. San Joaquin Valley residents have the least access to physicians per capita of any region in California. On average, there are 302 physicians per 100,000 people in California. In the Valley, the number of physicians plunges to 173 per 100,000.

Garamendi said he spoke yesterday with Congressman Dennis Cardoza, who is also excited

the plan is moving forward.

UC Merced has already invested significant time and money in the planning of the medical school. The university has authored a 96-page program proposal and business plan, named Maria Pallavicini vice provost for health sciences and commissioned the feasibility report from the Washington Advisory Group.

UC Merced opened in 2005 with 875 students. The school hopes to post enrollment of 25,000 by 2035.

An update with more information from UC Merced leaders and the Washington Advisory Group report will be available shortly. Check MercedSunStar.com for more updates as they become available.